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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000198

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: MAIN OPPOSITION CHP LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE -- IS CHP
CHAIRMAN BAYKAL FINISHED?

REF: A. 04 ANKARA 6841

[1](#)B. 04 ISTANBUL 01729

(U) Classified by Polcounselor John Kunstadter; reasons 1.4
(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Istanbul Sisli Mayor Mustafa Sarigul's challenge to Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal is the most serious challenge to Baykal's leadership in recent years. Yet Sarigul's bid is more than just the struggle between two men for the control of the second largest political party in Turkey. It is also a struggle over the relationship between "social democracy" in its Turkish variant and Turkish "secularism". In either event, as long as CHP remains in opposition we see no willingness to change its cheap, paranoid anti-American rhetoric. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The CHP extraordinary party convention, ostensibly set for 29 January, is billed as a final showdown between CHP leader Deniz Baykal and CHP Sisli Mayor Mustafa Sarigul. The two men have been fighting for control of the party for several months, with Sarigul leading political rallies around the country and Baykal accusing Sarigul of corruption. Fourteen CHP deputies called for Deniz Baykal's resignation last week in the aftermath of the decision by the CHP Supreme Disciplinary Board (YDK) to reject Baykal's corruption charges against Sarigul. Baykal responded by accusing Sarigul of bribing the YDK; claiming that corruption is rank within the party -- thereby simultaneously undermining his own claim to the party leadership and further denigrating the party's image in the eyes of the public -- and calling for a special party convention.

[1](#)3. (C) Sarigul's challenge to Baykal is more than just the struggle between two men for the control of the second largest political party in Turkey. It is also a struggle over the future of "social democracy" as understood in Turkey, especially the relationship between that movement and Turkish "secularism". Baykal, his inner circle, and the majority of CHP parliamentary deputies are left-of-center, elitist, "secular" politicians who are uncomfortable with the presence of Islam in the public sphere (ref A). Thus, according to CHP internal opposition figures like Istanbul MP Hasan Aydin and former CHP Secretary General Ertugrul Gunay, the party has alienated itself from the majority of Turkey's voters, who are generally more conservative and who resent CHP's scornful attitude toward visible manifestations of Islam. Indeed, they note, this is a chronic problem, given that CHP has been unable to win more than 20 percent of the vote since 1977.

[1](#)4. (C) Sarigul, in contrast, portrays himself in a carefully choreographed way as an observant Muslim and he won over 70 percent of the vote in his race to become mayor of the mixed "secular" and more pious Sisli in March 2004 (ref B). He has asserted to his supporters that if he were elected leader of the party, CHP would win over 40 percent of the vote in the next parliamentary election and become the majority party in Turkey. (Comment. Absent an unforeseen meltdown in ruling AK Party it is impossible for Sarigul to turn CHP's fortunes around so quickly, but it is widely believed that CHP cannot recover broad support as long as Baykal remains as the leader of the party. End Comment.)

[1](#)5. (C) Sarigul very publicly attends Friday noon prayers. He has very publicly spent municipality funds to fix up Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religious facilities in his municipality. He has also used municipality funds to take religious groups on tours of Islamic sites in Edirne and Konya. Aydin claims -- without giving any details -- that Sarigul has support among members of two leading Turkish religious societies, the Naksibendi brotherhood and the lodge of Fethullah Gulen. Sarigul's supporters see him as CHP's observant but "secular" answer to PM Erdogan. His critics, however, claim he is arrogant, untalented, corrupt, and overly authoritarian.

[1](#)6. (C) Baykal's ability arbitrarily to manipulate CHP rules and machinery makes it more difficult to predict the outcome of the current struggle. Erol Cevikce -- a former CHP State Minister and longtime Embassy contact on intra-CHP politics who correctly predicted two weeks ago that the YDK would not convict Sarigul -- estimates that 700-800 of the

approximately 1,200 party delegates are currently in the pro-Baykal camp. He also believes, however, that the wind is blowing in Sarigul's favor. Cevikce claims that Sarigul will muster 30,000 supporters to rally outside the party convention hall and pressure the delegates to back Sarigul. Cevikce also believes that the delegates' own political ambition may aid Sarigul. Many delegates want to be elected to parliament or other public offices, where they anticipate they can benefit from Sarigul's pork barrel largesse, and they believe that their chances are dim as long as the unpopular and elitist Baykal remains the leader of the party.

17. (C) Cevikce also noted that -- despite Baykal's public statement and press reports to the contrary -- the party administration has not yet officially announced an extraordinary party convention, raising the possibility that Baykal's announcement was just a ruse to expose would be challengers. Cevikce suggested that Baykal may be planning additional political maneuvers -- such as purging the YDK and having a new YDK remove Sarigul from the party -- before calling a new party convention to deal with remaining challengers to his leadership.

18. (C) There is also the possibility of a dark horse candidate emerging at the party convention. Several candidates have been mentioned in the press, including Kemal Dervis, Ertugrul Gunay, Hursit Gunes, Zulfu Livaneli, Haluk Koc, and Hikmet Cetin. Dervis, a former World Bank VP and Economy Minister 2001-mid-2002, and Hikmet Cetin, an establishment Kurdish baron who is currently NATO civil representative to Afghanistan and is a former speaker of parliament and FonMin, have publicly declared that they are uninterested in leading CHP. Moreover, Dervis has consistently shown himself inept at party politicking or at broadening his appeal beyond the urban "elites" in Western Turkey.

19. (C) In separate meetings with us, Ertugul Gunay and Haluk Koc carefully avoided commenting on whether they seek the chairmanship. Gunay, the party's former secretary general, is clearly dissatisfied with Baykal's leadership and believes the party must respect the religious beliefs of the majority of Turks, but did not endorse Sarigul in his meeting with us. Koc, the deputy party leader in parliament, was clearly and uncharacteristically nervous and unwilling to discuss internal politics. He also suggested that he might soon return to academia. (Note. Koc's nervousness may be a further indicator of how unstable the current political situation is within the party. End Note.)

110. (C) Cevikce, Cetin, and Omur Kumbaracibasi (former CHP minister) are working together to advance the case for former CHP mayor of Gaziantep Celal Dogan, according to Cevikce (strictly protect). If they are unsuccessful in advancing Dogan's cause, then they will try to "clear the road for Sarigul" because it is easier to use Sarigul to get rid of Baykal and then remove Sarigul "three months later" than it will be to remove Baykal if he survives the current crisis, according to Cevikce.

111. (C) Comment: Sarigul is adept at pumping up his image in some of the press but is deprecated as a phony by the broadest range of our contacts. He has tried to use his 2004 participation on an IV program to portray himself as backed by the U.S., a false impression that has gained currency among the chronically paranoid courtiers around Baykal (e.g., former ambassador Onur Oymen) but one we have worked to dispel among others in CHP and more generally. In the end, we do not foresee any diminution in CHP's cliché-ridden anti-Americanism as long as the party is in opposition. End comment.

EDELMAN